



Engagement of Religious Communities as Partners in Implementing Government Policies for National Development in Kapiri-Mposhi Urban, Zambia

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to investigate the engagement of religious communities as partners in implementing Government policies in Kapiri-Mposhi Urban in Zambia. The study utilised the Juergensmeyer (2008) Theory to probe the interaction between religious agencies and government officials in policy implementations. Juergensmeyer is concerned about why religion is taking on a growing prominence in political matters in a growing despair of the state of society. To explore this, the study drew upon a sample of 22 informants purposively selected from the target population that included political party leaders in Kapiri-Mposhi Urban, Seventh Day Adventist Church leaders, the Clergy from the Roman Catholic Church, and representatives from the Jehovah's Witness, United Church of Zambia, Pentecostal church, officials from Church Mother Bodies, Civic leaders and lay people. Open-ended and Semi-structured interview methods were applied to obtain the required primary data. Transcripts of the interviews were analysed thematically for respondents' perceptions of the engagement of Religious Communities as partners in implementing Government policies. Themes of Partnership, Fixed and Stable Church-government Relationship, Engagement and Reliable unconditional church-state Allies emerged from the findings as describing the relationship that existed between religious communities and government agencies in the implementation of policies. The study recommended that the engagement of religious communities with the government should reflect inclusivism among religious traditions so as to avoid Inter-Religious Conflicts taking place elsewhere within Africa.

Keywords: Religious Communities, Policy Implementation, Partnership Kapiri-Mposhi, Zambia.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study was carried out in 2021 in Kapiri-Mposhi, the rural-urban community in the Central Province of Zambia. In terms of religious adherence, Kapiri-Mposhi community is home to a number of Christian Church denominations, and non-Christian religious traditions such as Islam, depicting a true reflection of a malt-faith Zambia. Apart from people taking part in elections, religious communities have been engaged in working in partnership with the government for national development, such as in the formulation and implementation of policies for national development. In such collaborative engagements, religion has always been an integral element in society. It has not been something that only concerns individual lifestyles. On the one hand, the existing relationship between religion and the citizenry can be viewed as a private matter. On the other hand, it often has a public dimension. Ziwa (2020) contents that the church involvement in the political affairs of a society seems to be the most effective means by which the nation can ensure that justice prevails in the society. From the public perspective, religion has played its role in Kapiri-Mposhi Urban by lending a voice to the poor and vulnerable people through engaging with the government in several ways. Formulating and implementing national policies, especially those policies involving the marginalised sections of people in society, is just but one of those engagements. Therefore, cooperation between government and religious communities has offered great potential in this regard.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The collaborative interactive engagements between religious communities and state agencies in national development have always been viewed as an integral element in society. In the rural-urban community of Kapiri-Mposhi, the effectiveness of the religious engagements with government

agencies in policy implementation for national development has not been known, in the absence of a solid empirical backup. This prompted the current study.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

- i. To ascertain the engagement of religious communities with the government in policy implementation in Kapiri-Mposhi Urban.
- ii. To examine the existing relationship between religious communities and the government players in Kapiri Urban.

2. THEORETICAL LOCALE AND BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretically, this study was premised on Juergensmeyer's (2008) theory to probe a nexus of the interaction between religious agencies and government officials in policy implementations in Kapiri-Mposhi. Juergensmeyer's theory is the idea of explaining why religion is taking on a growing prominence in political matters. He contends that worldwide secular nationalism is defective. The Western models of nationhood have failed society. Religion is, therefore, presented as the 'hopeful alternative'. A growing despair of the state of society sets society in motion to try and restore a new political and moral order through religion. In this regard, Juergensmeyer (2008) refers to a situation in the Punjab during the 1980's. Religious leaders tried to restore hope to the community by making use of religion. This community was suffering at the hands of an immoral government filled with corrupt politicians. Partnership should be seen as a strategy to enhance programmatic success by learning from religious communities to shape programme priorities as well as by sharing and building on each partner's assets. Effective partnerships are the result of long-term and deliberate efforts that need to be integrated into work planning and funding cycles. Strategies for engagement with religious communities should be made explicit in-country programme action plans as well as annual work plans for programme sections, ensuring that religious communities are involved in national policy and planning forums, especially when they play a major service delivery role.

2.1. Religious and Political Discourses

Religious and political discourses touch upon deep human concerns. From a psychological point of view, religious and political decisions tend to be emotionally and sentimentally driven. The reason behind this is that religion as well as politics become a core identity marker of human existence. Through following a certain political trajectory, the continuation of the tradition of the ancestors is emphasised. In Japan, the national identity is closely connected to the Shinto religion. In Zambia, the national identity is closely connected to the Christian religion (Simuchimba, 2005). The interconnectedness of spheres causes religion to be a key identity marker in human existence. Religion can be a cultural as well as a political identifier. Nationalistic sentiments are reinforced through religion. By invoking religious elements, the collective memory of society is triggered to call in remembrance the unity of all that belongs to the particular tradition (*Ibid*).

By utilising religious jargon within the political discourse a subtle claim to divine approval of political decisions is made. Opposing political ideas are discredited by indicating the opposite through religious traditions. Divine wrath or evil upon the political opposition is invoked. Romans 13:1 says "Everyone must submit to governing authorities, for all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God" (NLT. Moyser (1991) indicates how some politicians still legitimize their rule in religious terms, even in a pluralistic society by giving preference to one religion.

2.2. Determining if Religious Communities are Effective Partners in Implementing Government Policies

According to Bowker (2010), religious communities have become the key determinants of the history and destiny of the nation, and its vast population, as well as deciding the course of development and building of the nation. The term religious communities broadly refer to both female and male religious actors and to systems and structures that institutionalize belief systems within religious traditions at all levels from local to global. These include Local worship communities such as

churches, mosques, synagogues and temples. They also include denominational leadership like bishops, clerics, ayatollahs, lamas, Scholars, theologians and religious educators. Mission workers include youth faith or inter-faith groups, Women of faith networks, Faith-based or faith-inspired organizations, Denominational, ecumenical and intra-religious institutions, umbrella organizations and networks. There is an immense complexity and diversity among religious communities with regard to both their position and status in society and organisationally (*Ibid*).

Religion and politics seem to have had an ambivalent relation over centuries: at close bed-fellows and at times crude opponents and on occasion even unconscious about the times existence of the other. The reasons for the type of relationships are however more important. Most of the major religious traditions have intra-religious (or denominational) organizations and associations that seek to consolidate the collective strength of their various branches or denominations in pursuit of policy-making, advocacy and other efforts to advance the principles of their faith. “The degree of structure varies, as the sector includes both defined religious communities with hierarchical leadership structures as well as decentralized ‘movements’ of individuals with shared principles and interests.” Some religious communities form organizations/networks/instruments for other specific purposes. Among these, some of the most visible in humanitarian and development contexts are referred to as Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) or faith-inspired organisations (*Ibid*).

These organisations operate in much the same way as other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in supporting development and, in many cases, emergency humanitarian responses across the whole spectrum of programming. Religious actors have deep and trusted relationships with their communities and often have strong linkages with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members. As such, they are particularly well placed to address inequity related to societal factors such as social norms, behaviours and practices that affect access to services or fuel discrimination and deprivation and thus facilitate efforts towards the realization of the rights of the most disenfranchised (*Ibid*).

Leaders of religious communities Clerics, bishops, rabbis, imams, priests, abbots, nuns, shamans, etc. as well as lay leaders and leaders of coordinating bodies and inter-religious associations can be powerful allies in governance. Religious leaders speak with authority on behalf of significant portions of the population, it is important to identify the leadership level at which engagement is necessary for the planned programming for example national, district, and local, particularly with religious communities that are very hierarchical. Religious leaders can influence thinking, foster dialogue and set priorities for members of their communities. For example, 74 per cent of people in Africa identify religious leaders as the group they trust most (Imakando, 1992). They shape social values and promote responsible behaviours that respect the dignity and sanctity of all life. Many religious leaders are skilled and influential communicators who can reach the hearts and minds of millions of people in ways that humanitarian actors and government cannot because they have more access to the family and personal spheres than most outside actors, religious leaders serve as an important conduit of communication for social change and transformation (Pettersson, 2007).

According to Volkmann (2008), in situations of conflict, the moral influence and trust bestowed on leaders of religious communities allows them to play significant roles in mediation and reconciliation, as well as to advocate for the special protection needs of children and other particularly vulnerable members of their communities. Religious leaders provide spiritual support and stability, which can help meet people’s psychosocial needs in the face of adversity. Many religious communities directly provide healthcare services, ranging from small community clinics to large hospitals, which often emphasize prenatal, newborn and children’s health services. It stresses physical health and the prevention of illness, many religions recognize the importance of emotional and mental health and encourage practices to promote it, such as meditation found in some form in most faith traditions, particularly within Hinduism and Buddhism and prayer. This holistic approach to well-being can be an important foundation on which to build multi-pronged health programming (Volkmann, 2008).

3. METHODOLOGY

Methodically, the study employed a descriptive design as the researchers were interested in gathering information on the use of religion by the political elites. A descriptive design attempts to describe characteristics of subjects or phenomena, opinions, attitudes, preferences and perceptions of persons

of interest to the researcher. It aims to obtain information from a representative of the population and from that sample; the researcher was able to present the findings as representative of the population (Orodho, 2009). This was considered appropriate since the study was essentially descriptive in the sense that it aimed to discover answers to underlying questions by attempting to describe and define the problem (Blumberg, 2014). Semi-structured interview were employed as methods of collecting data. This qualitative strategy was suitable for this study which enabled the researchers to investigate the engagement of Religious Communities in supplementing the implementation of government policies. Twenty-two (22) interviews were conducted with different religious leaders, political party leaders, civic leaders and ordinary citizenry. The selection of participants to constitute the sample was made purposively. Transcripts of the interviews were analysed in order to come up with emerging themes and subthemes from the findings.

3.1. Ethical Considerations

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, interviews were held in line with guidelines stipulated by the government of wearing masks and using hand sanitizers so that the health of participants was safeguarded.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. How Religious Communities Are Effective Partners in Implementing Government Policies in Kapiri-Mposhi Urban

One of the keen interests of the researchers was to get the views of the respondents on how religious bodies helped government agencies. The study revealed that religious communities were partners in the implementation of political policies. They were seen as fixed and stable entities, ever-present and generally trusted by members of the society. Religious communities had an effective network of communication and had functional infrastructure (for example, buildings, and vehicles, among others.) within the local community which were utilised for government purposes. The table below summaries the findings:

Table1. *Whether Religious Communities Offered Help to Government Agencies*

Responses	Frequency
Yes	18
No	1
Somehow	3
Total	22

Source: *Field data*

Table 1 above shows the information on how religions helped government agencies. From the findings, 18 of the participants indicated that religious leaders gave help to government agencies in different ways. One (1) participant said religious leaders did not help the government, while 3 indicated that religious leaders rendered help to government agencies.

4.2. Forms of Help Religious Communities Rendered to Government

Participants were further asked to state the forms of help religious communities offered to the public apart from spiritual help. Mrs. Haampwakili (pseudonym) from the United Church of Zambia narrated:

You know what madam, if there is any institution which helps the public unconditionally it is religion. I am saying so because apart from building schools, hospitals, universities and orphanages, religious communities have also taken part in the formulation of the draft policies and guidelines for running these institutions. They are also involved in peace building and does mediate conflicts in the civil service in one way or another (Interview with. Haampwakili, Kapiri-Mposhi, November 2021).

Another response was recorded from a Muslim, who said:

Religion is like the left hand of the government when it comes to supplementing government efforts. A practical example is what the Islamic religious community does country-wide. In the Mpulungu district in Northern Province we have built houses for the elderly and a boarding

school in Musende area for the underprivileged where pupils just learn for free.. Religious bodies have also added voices in the policy formulations that guide the management of these institutions. They have participated in most referenda held on important government opinions and in the rural areas, religious bodies are also mandated to host government occasions in infrastructure owned by religious communities. (Interview with a Muslim spiritual leader, Kapiri-Mposhi, November, 2021)

However, among the informants, some were atheists who gave views contrary to the ones cited by the respondents above. Mr *Nseele* (not real name), for instance, lamented thus:

...religion does not offer any help to the public, let alone the government, but it just preaches about the god we have never seen before and brainwashes its followers (Interview with Mr Nseele, Kapiri-Mposhi, November, 2021).

The responses above resonate well with observations of other scholars, that people in different contexts have different histories of tolerance of religion influencing public (secular) decisions. The South African and Japanese contexts exhibit a long tradition of acceptable use of religion within political discourse. Society seems to be content and used to this phenomenon. In Japan Shinto religion ensured a connection to the past enforcing nationalism. In South Africa religion has played a pivotal role in public decisions (Toyoda *et al*, 2002).

In the current study, participants' views on Religion's Contribution towards Helping the Government revealed that religious communities engaged in the implementation of political policies and development in Zambia. They were seen as present and trusted in society. This was because the Religious communities were believed to have an effective network of communication and had functional infrastructure (such as buildings, and vehicles) within the local community of Kapiri-Mposhi Urban.

When asked whether religion helped the government, one respondent gave the following view, which was similar in context to what others majority of the participants cited:

Religion is very helpful to the government because these two entities are inseparable and each cannot do without the other. Religion has the role of advising the government on how to run the affairs of the country in a peaceful way so as to avoid being in conflict with its citizens (Interview with a Civic leader, Kapiri-Mposhi, November 2021).

Another participant by the name of Kachimfya (pseudonym) shared his opinion on the issue of religious communities and how they helped the government. He remarked:

I remember what happened last year during gassing and when COVID-19 came into the country, the government tried their best to combat the two scourge but failed and at last, they ran to religion and asked churches to conduct prayers so that God could heal our land. Recently, before the 2021 elections, the government went back to religion again and asked churches to intercede so that Zambia could have peaceful elections: for peace to prevail before, during and after elections (Interview with Kachimfya, Kapiri-Mposhi, November 2021).

4.3. Religious Gatherings as Platforms for Public/ Government Use

The findings of the current study were consistent with the common view that the most obvious reason for government officials to make an appeal to religion is that religious gatherings or communities were platforms for government meetings. By addressing religious gatherings government officials might create the impression that they were religious themselves, creating the image of a moral, trustworthy, religious person. By utilising religious jargon and attending religious gatherings, people in government create the impression that they were making an appeal to affiliate to religions, and that the followers of the religion willingly became supporters of the government agenda based on the assumption that the implementers are 'one of us'. Giving religious recognition is gaining public support. There are however various other reasons for utilising religion as a public instrument. In some contexts, especially contexts subscribing to the African worldview, a holistic understanding of reality causes no separation to be drawn between the different spheres of existence. Everything has to do with everything. The interconnectedness of spheres makes it acceptable and even desirable for religious considerations to be part of public decisions (Norris *et al* 2004).

4.4. Consistency of Current Findings with Other Scholarly Works

Studies carried out by other scholars offer considerable correlations to substantiate the findings of the current study. Many scholars, for instance, reveal that the Church is active in peace-building, mediation and reconciliation at all levels, due to its trusted role and presence in communities. It plays the role of an impartial actor, seeking the common good and speaking out for those whose voices may not be heard (Durkheim, 1972; Davies, 1976 and Ziwa, *ibid*). Taking an empathetic approach, the Church has, for example, brought warring communities together in Kenya and Ethiopia, which has led to community reconciliation, protection of land and livestock, and a significant reduction in loss of life. The Peace and Justice Commission of the Catholic Church in Zambia and Ghana can be another example to cite; it organised election observers over the period to oversee the process. This is because the Church believes that the development of the nation can only be achieved when there is peace and tranquillity, which should be attained in dialogue with other people and faiths (Show reference). Inter-faith dialogue has enhanced civic duties and fosters peace by bolstering values of justice, forgiveness and cooperation. As a result, apart from elections, religious communities in Zambia have generally actively attempted to insert themselves into the national development project of the state. This is in agreement with Durkheim's (1912) concept of religion. He forwarded that all major world religions promoted a standard of behaviour in keeping with the tenets of their particular system of beliefs. This behaviour is motivated by an individual desire for a positive experience in this life and hopeful expectations of an eternal life to come. This individual standard of behaviour is shared by a community of believers and practiced as a group within the context of the larger society. As a consequence, religion has a considerable degree of influence over all other social institutions, politics and education inclusive (Ziwa, 2018). Thus, religious bodies contribute to national development through the provision of social institutions such as schools and hospitals as well as by influencing the Zambian and other African countries' public sphere through discourse that hinges on peaceful coexistence and the need to undertake civic duties. This sometimes takes the form of religious leaders calling on the state to ensure that the right things are done (Ghana News Agency, 2009).

4.5. Fostering Engagement through Religion

The findings of the Kapiri-Mposhi community depicted an experience of engagement between religion and government/political leaders. Such efforts might also be perceived as contributing to national development plans, ensuring the participation of religious communities in national processes. The hard work, time and resources needed to foster engagement was to be built into the design, budget, management and monitoring programmes. As part of the ongoing learning process around defining and creating partnerships with religious communities and governments, it was important to systematically document the findings gathered in the current study. This can help in the development of new methodologies for increasingly effective and sustained collaboration.

Toyoda (2002), talked about the use of religion for racial purity and superiority which fall under the moral and spiritual use of religion. Fridell (1983), talked about Shinto religion being used as a driving force behind patriotic loyalties in the light of increasing Japanese military activities in Asia leading up to the Second World War. Nasir (2020), has talked about religions being effective in politics because they directly touch the emotions, feelings and sentiments of the common people who have nothing except religion, Political elites use religion for purely political gain and it is a political tool and Hammad (2007), has pointed out that religion is often utilized as a political tool by the political elites in both Israel and Egypt. However, none of the above-reviewed scholars has documented why politicians challenge the competence and mandate of religion to comment on political matters, especially on bad governance tendencies restricting the mandate of religion to provide spiritual and moral guidance to the general citizenry (*Ibid*).

5. CONCLUSION

This article has provided an overview of the engagement of religious communities as partners in implementing government policies in Kapiri-Mposhi Urban in Zambia. What is clear from this overview is that religion has been and is still considered an instrument which political elites can either use for national development or abuse for pure personal-political gains. The findings of the current study have demonstrated that the use of religious communities by political elites or government

agencies in Kapiri-Mposhi Urban created an opportunity for more partnerships, stable relationships and therefore, effective engagement between government and religious bodies for development and humanitarian response in the townships. This is because religious people have a duty to abide by the ethical teachings, inherent in their religions and as such, will provide good leadership in championing developmental efforts. This also goes to demonstrate that religion, if positively used, promotes the political life of any society, because it has moral values which regulate and harmonize human life. In Zambia, religion is in various aspects of the citizens' life. It is at the heart of society, the cornerstones of the community, with a long reach into even the most remote communities. Religious leaders, therefore, hold people's trust and often have authority and influence where state and local officials do not. However, if not well intended or guarded, religion can easily be used as a tool to subvert the political needs and aspirations of the ruling class. As such, Since Zambia is a Multi-faith nation, the engagement of religious communities in executing national duties through the established structures of collaboration with the government should reflect inclusivism among religious traditions so as to avoid Inter-Religious Conflicts taking place elsewhere within Africa.

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